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## TWO OBLIGATIONS OF THE CHURCH TO A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY.

THERE never was a time in which the Christian spirit was more manifest than today. The religious interpretation almost universally given by the daily press to recent events in our national history; the multiplication of institutions for the care rather than the punishment of the criminal and unfortunate; the appeal to avowedly Christian motives in matters of international dispute; the appearance of a new moral sense in municipal politics; the rise of interdenominational religious bodies; the recognition of the self-sacrificing efforts of the missionary—all these are but a few of the evidences of the fact that social life is growing Christian. In literature the same is true. There never was a time when so many religious books were read, or when the interest in religious problems was so general, not merely among members of churches, but throughout the entire novel-reading world. And finally, whether as friend or foe of the Christian faith, it seems inevitable that every prominent scientific man should sooner or later enter most earnestly the field of religious discussion.

But there is another side to all this great movement. The statistics of organized Christianity show that the growth of many denominations in certain portions of the country has practically ceased. There are, in fact, great sections of the United States in which, if statistics could be accurately obtained, and all due allowance made for the double counting of members and the erasure of members

whose whereabouts are unknown, the membership of several denominations would show a decided decrease. Statements concerning the inefficiency of the church among working people may be exaggerated, but unfortunately are not altogether without foundation. The great socialistic movement, though having for its watchwords some of the most fundamental principles of Christianity, is yet often openly hostile to the church as an institution. Whatever may be the number of young men passing into the ranks of the ministry either without theological training or ill prepared, it is no longer a matter of doubt that the number of students for the ministry in colleges and theological seminaries is diminishing, not merely in the United States, but in England, Scotland, and Germany.

Such an apparent contradiction as is to be seen in an extraordinary growth of the Christian spirit and a stationary, if not a retrograde, movement on the part of organized Christianity, merits serious thought. Such facts make it impossible to say that Christianity itself is declining, but they do raise the question as to whether the church has any permanent mission in modern civilization. For the decrease of the efficiency of organized Christianity is due to no local cause, but is probably inevitable as a result of the extraordinary development in the thought and commerce of the last fifty years. Is it then something to cause despair, or is it simply an indication that in a society in many of its phases increasingly under the influence of Christian ideals, the mission of the church itself needs to be restated and reinforced?

No man who realizes the magnificent past and possible future for the church can for a moment hesitate in his answer: The present condition is temporary. As long as men are men ethics can never be a substitute for religion; society needs and will have a social institution for its religious life. Only the church must stand primarily and exclusively for religion. The time when it can stand co-ordinately for charity, culture, social reform, and

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religion is past. Other institutions are already performing these other functions that once in a less differentiated society belonged to the church, and, as society is now constituted, in many cases performing them well. It is not that the church shall abandon a single effort to benefit men and women, but that it shall clearly recognize its exclusive function and by its development of the religious spirit prompt men to helpfulness and, if need be, to sacrifice. It must lay a basis for morality in faith in God.

How may the religious efficiency of the church be increased? In a multitude of ways, of which we wish now to mention but two: by devotion to a positive biblical message, and by insistence upon religious worship. Many seem to imagine that the growth of the church will follow the simplification of creeds. We fear they are over-sanguine. Simplification of creeds is certain and desirable, but taken by itself it will not have an immediate, if even an ultimate, tendency to build up ecclesiastical organizations. The history of Protestantism makes this evident. Those denominations have grown most rapidly in which emphasis, whether avowedly or not, has been laid upon some distinct doctrine. The fact seems to be that liberalism has always been anti-ecclesiastical, for in religion even more than in politics the party of opposition is likely to disintegrate. It is true that the liberal movement of today has passed into a constructive period; but, although we do not claim to be prophets, one thing seems perfectly evident—the church, to grow, must stand for something other than creed-reduction; it must stand for definite convictions as to sin and God and salvation through faith. The day for euphemisms and conscience-ruining theological casuistry is past. If the Bible has any message for today's life, it is time the church spoke it in words that men of today will understand.

But it is not enough for the church to teach religion; it must give its supporters an opportunity to express religious life in worship. Why should a church service be a combination of music and lyceum? Outside of the Protestant Episcopal church

the general tendency of Protestantism during the last two hundred years has been toward the emphasis of the doctrinal and the diminution of the worship element in church service. The sermon has been the chief element, all else merely the introductory exercises. But however legitimate the origin of this too great emphasis on doctrine may have been, no one would for a moment deny that the importance of worship in our church service needs now to be emphasized. For worship is essentially a social act. A man may pray alone, but he worships in company. And one among many of the reasons for the growth of those denominations emphasizing ritual is undoubtedly the desire on the part of men who hold some evangelical creed to join in worship rather than to listen to a theological or any other sort of discussion.

It would be foolish to hold that merely to increase definiteness of teaching and the element of worship in religious services would be at once to inaugurate a new period of ecclesiasticism. They are but two of many needed reforms; but they are reforms that can and should be made. They will give character to the entire work of any church organization; they will emphasize the religious function of the church as over against mere philanthropy. And, unless we are mistaken, there are signs of their coming. Criticism, notwithstanding the fears of numerous good men, has been laying the foundations of a new apologetic that is giving to many young men a new confidence in the trustworthiness of the gospel. Theological seminaries are ceasing to be scholastic retreats—if indeed all of them ever were. The new ministry, despite its own mistakes and the suspicion of some of its elders, is in earnest to bring Jesus Christ to the world and the world to Jesus Christ. Already there is a clearer appreciation of the mission of religion to society. When the mass of church members see their duty as clearly as this new ministry sees its mission, the day of lamentation and hesitation will end. There is a gospel to preach; there is a God to worship and love. The church that makes men believe this and helps them to live according to their faith will

not lack members or influence. Such a church will be devoted to every form of social service it can prosecute effectively—institutional, charitable, economic, municipal; but all this activity will spring spontaneously from a membership who have been taught biblical truth and have been aided to worship by an emphasis upon biblical piety.

For these reasons, and more than all because men are really studying the Bible, we believe that the next few years will see a new growth of the church, because its leaders know the Scriptures and believe in the message of the Scriptures.